



BARRIERS PREVENTING EFL TEACHERS FROM PARTICIPATING AND CONSTRUCTING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

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Abstract:

Communities of practice (CoPs) appeared to be one of the possible solutions for professionals, especially EFL teachers, who have to deal with an increasing number of complicated tasks and problems which cannot be individually solved effectively. However, CoPs were reported in several studies not to reach the popularity they deserve. Hence, this study is aimed at identifying the barriers that prevent EFL teachers from participating and constructing CoPs. The study was conducted in different cities and provinces in the Mekong Delta. A questionnaire was employed to examine participants' agreement on the suggested barriers described in the theoretical framework, and interviews were used to confirm and improve the results of the quantitative data collected. Regarding the research participants, 116 EFL teachers in public schools and English centers in the Mekong Delta responded to the questionnaire, while seven of them were chosen to conduct the interviews. The findings were classified into teacher-related and organization-related barriers. While the former includes cultural and psychological factors, the latter consists of barriers from school leaders' power and policies.

Keywords: communities of practice, barriers, EFL teachers

1. Introduction

In the age of innovation, an increasing number of more complicated tasks are raised in the teaching environment, which leads to a circumstance in which working individually does not earn sufficient effectiveness, but teachers need to cooperate with their colleagues to find more potential solutions. Moreover, teachers nowadays carefully understand the vital role of the professional development process because of its remarkable positive effects on teachers' self-development in skills, knowledge, and changes in classroom organization Garet et al. (2001). As a result, they tend to look for opportunities where

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they can exchange experiences with others and develop their personal and professional skills.

As a light of possible solutions, Lave and Wenger (1991) developed a brand-new term, communities of practice (CoPs), which describes a community where teachers collaborate to figure out appropriate and efficient approaches to their common phenomena. However, despite its benefits and contributions to teaching effectiveness and teachers' professional development, CoPs are still not reaching their popularity as expected in English-teaching environments. This has been explained by several studies suggesting numerous barriers teachers may face in their professional working environment. Ardichvili, Page, and Wentling (2003) mentioned teachers' perceptions and personalities as significant reasons, while Hamel et al. (2012) and Haas et al. (2021) suggested external factors be substantial obstacles. Baran and Cagiltay (2010) also divided teachers' barriers into three categories, including personal, interpersonal, and environmental aspects, to provide intimate sight into this field.

When considering the situation in Vietnam, communities of practice appear to be a new definition for teachers, which also raises considerable problems or barriers to be constructed in educational communities. This is interpreted because of cultural differences and institutional management and organization. However, there is a lack of studies focusing on this field of research, especially in the Vietnamese context, where many EFL teachers are working and developing. Therefore, this study aims to identify barriers preventing teachers from constructing and participating in communities of practice. Remarkably, this study will examine factors related to teachers and organizations that discourage their participation in CoPs. The former factors are believed to include cultural barriers and psychological factors, while the latter is believed to be related to leaders' power and schools' policies.

To reach the research aims, the study attempts to answer the following research question:

- What barriers prevent EFL teachers from participating and constructing communities of practice?

To clarify the findings of the study, there are two sub-questions following the main research question:

- What teachers-related barriers prevent EFL teachers from participating and constructing communities of practice?
- What organization-related barriers prevent EFL teachers from participating and constructing communities of practice?

2. Literature review

2.1. Communities of practice

Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) suggested that "*communities of practice are formed by people who engage in the process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor*". In other words, this is a community for those interested in common

communication and getting involved in exchanging processes to fulfill their needs. They continued to emphasize CoPs as an activity in which members share understandings regarding their actions and intentions towards the common communities. Tang and Yang (2005), and Milne and Callahan (2006) also agreed with this definition when they defined CoPs as groups of members who share a concern and passion related to problems, and solutions, and they have a tendency to perform interactions to exploit and develop their knowledge and expertise. This is also true for how Hur and Brush (2009, p. 280) described a CoP, or particularly, this community is suggested to be *“groups of practitioners who share knowledge, concerns, and values within a supportive culture”*. In addition, Brooks (2010, p. 64) added that *“dynamic social structures’ that ‘activated through interactions.”* This means a CoP requires interactive contribution from its members in order to construct an environment in which their common topics are exchanged and solved properly and effectively. To this point, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) previously mentioned the significance of mutual engagement, learning, and sharing as the central objective when participating in and constructing a CoP and the profound frontier for a CoP’s sufficient development.

2.2. Theoretical framework

In this study, the barriers that prevent teachers from participating and constructing communities of practice are described as two main clusters, namely teacher-related and organization-related ones, and will be presented in the following sub-sections.

2.2.1. Teacher-related barriers

Regarding teacher-related barriers, they are classified into cultural barriers and psychological barriers.

A. Cultural barriers

Legitimacy is described as one of the cultural barriers when Goldstein (2004) and Murphy (2015) suggested that teachers hold a belief that teachers’ working activities should occur only in classrooms to be legal. In other words, teachers are expected to engage in activities assigned by higher positions in their bureaucracy, such as teaching, designing lesson plans, attending training sections, and other paperwork, and they should not participate in activities or communities out of their workplace’s control, including communities of practice.

Another cultural barrier is related to how teachers choose their partners in knowledge-exchanging activities, or it can be described that teachers are made to believe that they are not free to choose who they can share their professional topics with. Murphy (2015) indicated that only formal school administrators, namely national ministry, regional departments, or school directors, have the right to contact teachers from other schools. In contrast, teachers should only interact with their colleagues in their schools.

Levine and Marcus (2007) and Murphy (2015) described that EFL teachers tend to deal with their problems by themselves instead of asking for help from others since they are unwilling to bother their colleagues. This unintentionally becomes a barrier hindering those teachers from participating in CoPs, where they can share teaching knowledge and

experiences. This belief poses no need for them to interact with one another. Besides that, Murphy (2015) also mentioned privacy rules as another cultural barrier, which requires them to respect other teachers' teaching practices and not interfere in others' affairs.

Another cultural barrier preventing EFL teachers from participating and constructing CoPs is called teachers' ego. Ardichvili et al. (2003) proposed that shyness and fear of criticism are primary barriers discouraging teachers from sharing their knowledge with the community. Ardichvili (2008) mentioned Asian cultures as a significant factor having crucial effects on teachers' active participation in knowledge-sharing processes, which are believed to threaten those who pay attention to saving their face. Nguyen (2015) explained that teachers' face reflects and affects their social activities. In addition to teachers' ego aspects, Baran and Cagiltay (2010) mentioned teachers' competence in language, and teaching practices is another barrier preventing EFL teachers from participating in CoPs. In particular, the fear of giving wrong answers due to their lack of professional knowledge and skills discourages teachers from contributing to exchange activities, so they find no motivation to attend CoPs.

Next, numerous previous related studies considered teachers' civility rules as a significant barrier as these limit teachers' choices of activities to avoid arguments and conflicts with others. Dannetta (2002) indicated that teachers hold a belief that criticisms are unprofessional and they can reduce the effectiveness of their collaboration. Hew and Hara (2007) also claimed that teachers avoid conversations that can cause offensive and critical feelings, making them intentionally keep silent in community meetings or references. Teachers are also described to experience hesitation to communicate with others since they do not want to begin a debate among members (Baran & Cagiltay, 2010).

Another cultural barrier is teachers are afraid of getting out of their comfort zones. CoPs are described as a community of high collegiality, while their members' motivation to join the community is sometimes weak (Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007). In other words, when participating in CoPs, teachers are expected to engage in a number of activities contributing to mutual objectives and plans, which means they have to spend a great deal of time and effort, making them demotivated to participate in these communities. Baran and Cagiltay (2010) added that teachers are not willing to volunteer their efforts in non-obligatory communities to obtain new knowledge, but they prefer easier ways that cost less effort. Hence, "*maximum benefit, minimum effort*" reduces teachers' active participation in CoPs. Besides that, Murphy (2015) demonstrated that teachers are familiar with their current school systems' organization; while attending new structures, especially CoPs, they must adjust their working styles to fit the community's context, which also demotivates them from participating in CoPs.

B. Psychological barriers

Most teachers are believed to pay attention to only their ongoing educational systems and do not know the existence of CoPs (Murphy, 2015), which partially explains the unpopularity of CoPs. However, for those teachers who have known about CoPs, they do not consider participation in CoPs as a priority in their professional development, and CoPs are just perceived as a secondary source of knowledge (Baran & Cagiltay, 2010).

Another psychological barrier, teachers' trust in other members, mainly occurs in virtual CoPs. Gannon-Leary and Fontainha (2007) indicated that when participating in CoPs, faith is believed to be a vital motivation for members to share their knowledge and understandings. However, Tomes (2003) suggested that trust is primarily developed through face-to-face communications and interactions. Hence, many teachers are demotivated to participate in vCoPs since they lack visual and verbal exchanges for the members to build trust in their new relationships. Toland and Thomas (2018) later reclaimed that CoPs members need confidence to freely contribute to knowledge-exchanging activities, which chiefly decides CoPs' existence and achievement.

Next, Hew and Hara (2007), and Murphy (2015) mentioned lack of time as a primary barrier preventing teachers from actively participating in CoPs. Firestone and Martinez (2007) explained that the shortage of time sticks teachers to their working systems, and they have no intention to participate in any other communities requiring time investment. Baran and Cagiltay (2010), and Cosner (2011) also agreed that lack of time is believed to decrease the amount of information and knowledge sharing in the communities since teachers tend to prioritize their targets and missions in their workplaces rather than contribute to CoPs.

Another barrier related to vCoPs that discourages teachers' participation is their fear of misunderstanding. The main methods of information exchange in these communities are text messaging, email, and text posts. Gannon-Leary and Fontainha (2007) described that ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) are implemented to deal with geographical gaps, but it possibly leads to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of messages. Hew and Hara (2007) also suggested when interacting in vCoPs, teachers experience a fear of misunderstanding as the lack of visual and verbal cues in their texts and comments on the common platform.

Baran and Cagiltay (2010) proved that when operating online, asynchronous discussion methods are suggested to be a considerable barrier since teachers feel exhausted when having a great number of unread messages after a while of not using the Internet.

Hew and Hara (2007) mentioned the lack of knowledge as the first and foremost barrier hindering teachers from participating in a knowledge-sharing CoP. Teachers tend to keep silent when they have no additional comments different from other members. Gannon-Leary and Fontainha (2007) added that some kinds of knowledge are difficult to disseminate to large groups of teachers since the other teachers may lack prior knowledge or have lower levels of knowledge and expertise to properly understand what is shared. Baran and Cagiltay (2010) confirmed that the difference in members' levels of language competence and professional expertise is described to discourage teachers' active participation in CoPs.

2.3.2. Organization-related barriers

Related to teachers' school bureaucracy, Murphy (2015) suggested that teachers are expected to follow what is designed and assigned by their leaders in their working

schools (Troen & Boles, 1996), which means they seem to be not allowed to update and implement lesson designs and materials from informal sources. He also mentioned that leaders of the school do not expect their teachers to participate in different communities which are not under their control since it challenges their management and threatens their values. Chrispeels and Martin (2002) previously claimed that school leaders believe that when attending CoPs, teachers will acquire and implement outside rules and alternative methods different from their current ones, which may negatively affect their advantaged positions.

Gannon-Leary and Fontainha (2007) researched a barrier related to members' institutional policies which are crossing virtual boundaries among organizations can lead to organizational-related problems, especially legal ones, including data confidentiality and intellectual property. Ardichvili (2008) also agreed one barrier preventing professional people, including EFL teachers, from participating in knowledge-sharing CoP is believed to be information hoarding.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

116 participants, who are current EFL teachers teaching in public schools and English centers in some provinces and cities in the Mekong Delta, were delivered a questionnaire. After administering the questionnaire, 7 EFL teachers were chosen from the participants in the questionnaire to be the interviewees for the interview section. These interviewees were decided based on their gender, years of teaching experience, and workplace to guarantee the diversity and generalization of the results.

3.2. Instruments

To answer the research question and the sub-questions, the mix-method approach was deployed, including a questionnaire to examine to the extent the participants understand and agree with the suggested barriers and an interview to confirm or revise information gathered from the questionnaire and to deeply explore raised aspects from the participants have suggested.

3.2.1. The questionnaire

The designed questionnaire, primarily based on the theoretical framework developed in the literature review, includes two main sections. The first section consists of background questions, which are multiple-choice questions, to collect background information from the respondents about their gender, teaching experience, and workplace. The second section contains 26 opinion questions to collect teachers' agreement on the developed framework about the barriers suggested in previous related studies. This section is divided into two clusters, namely teacher-related and organization-related barriers; especially, the former cluster is classified into two smaller parts, which are cultural and psychological barriers. The questions in this section are designed as matrix questions that

apply 5-point -Likert scale questions to examine participants' agreement on the suggested barriers.

To pilot the reliability of my research instruments, 32 participants were recruited for data collection. These participants, chosen from the contacts on the researchers' social networking sites, are EFL teachers and administrators working in a public school and an English center in a city in the Mekong Delta. The collected data was later analyzed on the SPSS version 20.0 to check its reliability. A Scale Test was run to check the reliability of the questionnaire. The result indicated that the internal consistency of the questionnaire was $\alpha = .87$. The questionnaire showed to be a reliable tool to be used for data collection.

3.2.2. The semi-structured interviews

The interviews were conducted one week after finishing gathering the quantitative data. These interviews were organized through video-conferencing tools, namely Zoom and Zalo, due to geographical gaps. The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to ensure the interviewees can comfortably share their ideas about the study's topic. The interviewees' answers were recorded for data analysis later.

3.3. Research design

This study applied the mixed-methods design, which is described to combine quantitative and qualitative methods for collecting and analyzing data to produce reliable findings (Lichtman, 2013). In detail, this study implemented the explanation design in which the quantitative method is constructed in advance of the qualitative method, which later improves or clarifies the results of the former method (Creswell and Clark, 2006). In other words, the questionnaire examined to the extent that participants agree with the suggested theoretical framework. Later, the interviews helped the researcher confirm and confide the findings of the questionnaire by verbally interacting with chosen participants.

4. Findings

4.1. The results from the quantitative data analysis

A Descriptive Statistics test was run to demonstrate the average score of EFL teachers' agreement on the suggested barriers preventing them from constructing and participating in communities of practice (CoPs). The results are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3 below. Teachers' levels of agreement were then analyzed based on the Range Level including five levels, namely strongly disagree (ranging from 1.0 to 1.8), disagree (ranging from 1.81 to 2.6), neutral (ranging from 2.61 to 3.4), agree (ranging from 3.41 to 4.2), and strongly agree (ranging from 4.21 to 5.0).

A. Cultural barriers

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Structural Barriers (N=116)

Questions	Mean	SD
1. Teachers' activities should only occur in classrooms.	1.93	0.90
2. Attending communities outside the classrooms breaks the workplace's policies.	1.79	0.88
3. Only formal school administrators have the right to contact other teachers.	2.22	0.91
4. Teachers can only interact with their colleagues within their workplace.	1.76	0.95
5. Teachers tend to deal with teaching problems themselves.	2.67	1.05
6. Teachers should not interfere with others' affairs to respect others' privacy.	3.01	1.00
7. Teachers are afraid of CoPs' high collegiality.	2.36	1.01
8. Teachers are afraid of others' criticism.	2.07	0.99
9. Teachers are afraid of lacking the subject knowledge.	2.24	1.03
10. Teachers are afraid of conflicts and arguments with others.	2.21	1.04
11. Teachers are afraid that they are not well-competent.	1.97	0.96
12. Teachers are not willing to invest much effort to obtain new knowledge.	2.24	1.07
13. Teachers are not willing to change my working styles.	2.01	0.92
Total	2.19	0.61

In terms of EFL teachers' beliefs in legitimacy, the results in Table 1 showed that the participants disagree that teachers' activities should only occur in classrooms (M=1.93), and they strongly disagree that participating in activities and communities outside the classrooms will break their workplace's rules and policies (M=1.79). Related to teachers' belief in whom they can communicate with, the teachers disagree that only formal school administrators, such as the Department of Education and Training, or schools' presidents, have the right and ability to contact their teaching staff from their schools and other organizations (M=2.22). Besides, they strongly disagree with the belief that teachers are only allowed to interact with their colleagues within their workplace, but not teachers from other schools (M=1.76).

Related to EFL teachers' beliefs in autonomy and privacy, the participants expressed a neutral agreement when considering whether their tendency to deal with their teaching problems by themselves depends on their unwillingness to bother their colleagues (M=2.67). Meanwhile, the participants hold a neutral belief that teachers should not interfere with others' affairs to show respect for others' privacy (M=3.01).

About EFL teachers' fear of criticism and conflicts, the participants disagree that the fear of criticism discourages teachers from sharing their ideas in a knowledge-sharing community (M=2.07). They also disagree that teachers are afraid of sharing since they think they may lack the subject knowledge (M=2.24). Besides that, they also disagree that being incompetent in other teachers' perception is why they are afraid of asking others for help (M=1.97). Additionally, the teachers disagree that the willingness to avoid conflicts and arguments with others discourages teachers from attending sharing activities in CoPs (M=2.21).

Regarding EFL teachers' comfort zones, the participants disagree that teachers are afraid of participating in CoPs as those communities require high collegiality (M=2.36).

The participants also expressed their disagreement with the idea that teachers do not want to attend voluntary activities because they fear spending more effort on obtaining new knowledge (M=2.24). Finally, the teachers disagree that being used to their current organizational structures and unwillingness to change their working styles are why they do not participate in CoPs (M=2.01).

Finally, to examine whether external factors, especially gender and working environment, influence teachers' agreement on the cultural barriers preventing them from constructing and participating in communities of practice, two independent-sample T-tests were implemented. The first independent-sample T test was calculated to compare the mean scores of male and female participants regarding their agreement on suggested barriers. The result indicated that no difference between the two means was observed ($t=1.35$; $p=.18$). Participants' agreement on proposed barriers is the same, considering gender. Also, another independent-sample T test was implemented to compare the mean scores of teachers from high schools and English centers. The result showed that no difference between the two means was observed ($t=.10$; $p=.92$). Participants' agreement on suggested barriers is the same regarding teachers' workplace. In short, external factors, including gender and teachers' workplace, have no influence on the results of the process in this cluster.

B. Psychological barriers

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Psychological Barriers (N=116)

Questions	Mean	SD
14. Teachers have never heard about CoPs	2.62	1.25
15. Teachers don't consider CoPs a good and reliable source of knowledge	2.56	1.03
16. Teachers prefer face-to-face communication and interaction rather than vCoPs	3.55	1.10
17. Teachers don't attend CoPs due to their lack of time	3.16	1.10
18. Teachers are afraid of misunderstanding when using text messages	2.67	1.15
19. Teachers are afraid of missing some important information in vCoPs	3.31	1.08
20. Teachers are afraid of not having different answers from other teachers'	2.61	1.07
21. Teachers are afraid of criticism from teachers who are more competent	2.28	0.91
Total	2.85	0.65

First, the data in the Table 2 revealed that the participants had a neutral agreement that they had never known about the communities of practice (M=2.62). They also disagree that they consider CoPs an unreliable source of knowledge compared with other commonly-used sources, such as the Internet or their colleagues (M=2.56). Besides that, the participants agree that teachers prefer face-to-face communication and interaction as they can quickly build trust with others rather than in virtual communities (M=3.55). However, they have a mixed considerations about whether they have sufficient time for activities outside classrooms since they spend a great deal of time teaching (M=3.16).

In addition, when it comes to participation in virtual communities of practice, the participants neutrally agree that teachers are afraid that using messaging tools may lead to misunderstanding since those methods lack both verbal and visual cues (M=2.67).

Furthermore, the participants propose a mixed agreement with the idea that teachers are afraid of missing essential parts of information due to the overloading number of messages and notifications when attending to a virtual group of teachers (M=3.31).

Besides related to teachers' level differences, the participants agree that teachers tend to keep silent in knowledge-sharing activities because they think they have the same answers as other teachers (M=2.61). Finally, the participants disagree with the statement that teachers are discouraged from participating in knowledge-sharing activities in CoPs due to their fear of criticism from teachers with higher levels of knowledge and expertise (M=2.28).

Finally, to examine whether external factors, especially gender and working environment, influence teachers' agreement on the psychological barriers preventing them from constructing and participating in communities of practice, two independent-sample T-tests were implemented. The first independent-sample T test was calculated to compare the mean scores of male and female participants regarding their agreement on suggested barriers. The result indicated that no difference between the two means was observed ($t=-46$; $p=.65$). Participants' agreement on proposed barriers is the same, considering gender. Also, another independent-sample T test was implemented to compare the mean scores of teachers from high schools and English centers. The result showed that no difference between the two means was observed ($t=.89$; $p=.38$). Participants' agreement on suggested barriers is the same regarding teachers' workplace. In short, external factors, including gender and teachers' workplace, do not influence the results of the process in this cluster.

C. Organization-related barriers

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Organization Barriers (N=116)

Questions	Mean	SD
22. Teachers prefer content designed by higher positions in the bureaucracy	2.78	0.94
23. Teachers' leaders do not want their teachers to participate in CoPs	2.17	0.92
24. Teachers' leaders think CoPs may threaten their advantaged positions	2.29	0.95
25. Teachers are afraid of the legal aspects when sharing information in CoPs	2.89	1.15
26. Teachers' material-sharing activities are discouraged by school policies	2.61	1.11
Total	2.55	0.70

The results in Table 3 showed that the participants have a neutral agreement with the idea that teachers prefer to follow plans and lessons designed by higher positions in their bureaucracy (M=2.78). Additionally, the participants disagree with the statement that teachers are unwilling to attend CoPs since their leaders do not want them to participate in activities without their control and management (M=2.17). Besides that, the participants also disagree that teachers' leaders do not want them to attend CoPs since updates and suggestions by CoPs may threaten their advantaged positions (M=2.29).

Next, regarding policy-related aspects, the participants partly agree that teachers are afraid of sharing information with CoPs since they are worried about the legal

aspects, especially data confidentiality and intellectual property (M=2.89). Last but not least, the results show that the participants have a neutral disagreement with the idea that teachers cannot exchange information with teachers from other schools due to their workplace's policies (M=2.61).

Finally, to examine whether external factors, especially gender and working environment, have an influence on teachers' agreement on the organization-related barriers preventing them from constructing and participating in communities of practice, two independent-sample T-tests were implemented. The first independent-sample T test was calculated to compare the mean scores of male and female participants regarding their agreement on suggested barriers. The result indicated that no difference between the two means was observed ($t=-.52$; $p=.61$). Participants' agreement on suggested barriers is the same, taking gender into consideration. Also, another independent-sample T test was implemented to compare the mean scores of teachers from high schools and English centers. The result showed that no difference between the two means was observed ($t=.61$; $p=.54$). Participants' agreement on suggested barriers is the same regarding teachers' workplace. In short, external factors, including gender and teachers' workplace, do not influence the results of the process in this cluster.

4.1.2. The results from the qualitative data analysis

4.1.2.1. Cultural barriers

A. Teachers' beliefs in legitimacy

Three out of seven interviewees indicated that there are always rules and policies in an organization to enhance and navigate everyday professional operations; however, they also confirmed that there seem to be no written rules defining what teachers should or should not do. Teacher F provided the following key ideas:

"Yeah, in general, I have been working in a public school for four years, but I have never seen or read any documents about what teachers should or should not do". (Teacher F)

B. Teachers' beliefs in autonomy and privacy

Regarding privacy and respect, only one interviewee revealed that he believes there are only certain situations, mainly teaching observations, where teachers can ask others for advice or help. Besides, he also mentioned that he needs to care about his interaction with others when asking for help, and he must ask questions gently and respectfully. Teacher A commented that:

"But we have to ask for help in the gentlest way so that those teachers give directions enthusiastically". (Teacher A)

Regarding teachers' autonomy, two participants indicated that they do not feel shy when asking for help. Still, they believe that teachers should share their knowledge in advance of receiving others, and before asking for help, they have to do research and

make efforts to answer themselves in order not to bother other teachers. Teacher C said that:

“But, of course, we have to do research enough and try our best to find the answers before asking for others’ help since it is quite annoying to others because they are quite busy”.
(Teacher C)

C. Teachers’ fear of criticism

The participants proposed that after years of working as an EFL teacher, they recognize the importance of exchanging activities in the teaching environment, so they welcome feedback and criticism from other teachers as long as they are constructive. This means if teachers have awareness of the benefits of CoPs, they can overcome their fears to engage in CoPs’ knowledge-sharing activities. Teacher A said:

“In brief, I feel quite comfortable with others’ advice, but importantly, that advice or contribution should be constructive so that I can listen to and improve myself.” (Teacher A)

D. Teachers’ civility rules

The data gathered for the interviews revealed that an indispensable condition when engaging in arguments is that they should lead to a solution for common problems, making those arguments and conflicts meaningful. Therefore, EFL teachers are not afraid of having opinions and disagreements while participating in knowledge-sharing activities as long as the outcomes of those arguments are valuable ideas for common problems. Teacher G described that:

“But arguments should lead to an answer or a solution at the end to make those arguments meaningful and useful.” (Teacher G)

E. Teachers’ comfort zones

The participants pointed out that although some teachers may be afraid that they will lose their strategies when being a member of communities of practice, they also know that it is essential for teachers to meet more people to share what they have gained in their teaching processes, which positively enhances their career through exchanging experiences and strategies. This reclaims the idea that if teachers understand the benefits of CoPs, they can overcome their fear to participate in the communities. Teacher G shared:

“We need to share more, meet more people, and transfer our enthusiasm as well as our knowledge and experience in teaching to help people develop.” (Teacher G)

Furthermore, one participant mentioned the effect of Asian cultures on why teachers are usually not self-motivated to participate in professional activities but need a motivator to lead them into the processes. He also emphasized the significant role of an admin, who should be open-minded and motivative, in enhancing teachers' participation in communities of practice. Teacher B said:

"Group owners need to show that he is knowledgeable and open so that other members are willing to share what they know, and he needs to make people feel motivated to contribute to the group, not feel judged to be good or not". (Teacher B)

4.1.2.2. Psychological barriers

A. Teachers' trust in CoPs

The data collected from the interviews confirmed that teachers believe that CoPs provide diverse sources of knowledge and materials, which are carefully checked and justified before being shared in the communities. Teacher D commented that:

"There are many lecturers and teachers from different environments and teaching contexts, so this is a good environment for English teachers to learn". (Teacher D)

However, the participants also indicated that it is necessary to carefully consider knowledge and materials shared in CoPs since not all are suitable for their teaching contexts or can be applied in every situation. Teacher C said:

"Yeah, I think it is reliable only when we double-check what we have listened to. For example, we go home and consider whether what others say is correct or not, or whether it can be applied in our situations or not". (Teacher C)

B. Teachers' trust in other members

The participant expressed that they pay more attention to their partners' personalities than the methods of communication since they believe that the characteristics of speakers decide the effectiveness and productivity of exchanging processes. They also mentioned participants' interests in the discussed topics as one of the main reasons for their participation activities in CoPs. Teacher F said:

"Because the method we use to communicate is not as important as the personalities of the people we are communicating with." (Teacher F)

C. Teachers' lack of time

After conducting interviews, it is revealed that although they are willing to participate in professional activities in CoPs for their self-development, teachers in public schools have to fulfill many missions, such as paperwork, lesson design, training sections, or exams preparation. Teacher A described:

"Besides usual missions like designing lesson plans, some unexpected duties, such as other paperwork, training sections, or examinations." (Teacher A)

However, two participants from private centers claimed that teachers' willingness is the most crucial factor in deciding their participation in CoPs, so if they are interested in CoPs, they definitely can manage their time for it. Teacher G suggested:

"As long as they want it to happen, they can actively manage their time for it". (Teacher G)

D. Teachers' fear of misunderstanding in vCoPs

The data collected from the interviews explained that although teachers know exchanging information through text messaging may cause misunderstanding, they can use functions provided on the Internet, such as comments or calls, to discuss more profoundly with writers to avoid unexpected understanding problems. Teacher A said:

"Because we are quite close, if I have any problems understanding, I can call them, so I do not worry that I cannot understand what they share." (Teacher A)

Hence, although teachers are afraid of misunderstanding when interacting through texts in vCoPs, they also believe there are possible solutions to this problem.

E. Teachers' fear of missing critical information in vCoPs

The interviewees mentioned the vital role of those groups' admins in moderating posts and messages and making regulations on the content as well as the number of posts and messages. Teacher G said:

"Also, I see that the admins of those groups also have an important role in moderating posts and making regulations on the content of posts, as well as the number of posts." (Teacher G)

Besides, one participant mentioned the storage function of text messaging tools, which can help teachers store unread messages to check later when available. Teacher F added:

"The posts or messages are still stored on groups, so when I have time, I can check them later." (Teacher F)

F. Teachers' level differences

After conducting the interviews with the participants, three out of seven participants also mentioned their worries about other teachers' reactions to their sharing since they believe that other teachers may have better answers or higher levels of professional knowledge.

They also described that they are afraid if their problems are faced by the majority of teachers or only their issues, which discourages them from sharing since they think their sharing cannot reach others' interests. Teacher E commented:

"Or sometimes I don't know if other teachers are having the same problem as me or if it's just my problem." (Teacher E)

However, the participants also suggested that teachers have beliefs in the benefits of knowledge-sharing activities, so they are willing to contribute to groups' discussion or sharing when necessary. Teacher D shared that:

"That is, often for young teachers, they will probably have the mood to often listen to the sharing of other teachers, teachers with more experience who have been teaching for a long time, but for the content that if young teachers have things that are of interest, they can also share what they think." (Teacher D)

4.1.2.3. Organization-related barriers

A. Teachers' school bureaucracy

The participants confirmed that teachers know the benefits of attending CoPs, so not being able to apply and implement what they learn is not a significant barrier preventing their participation in CoPs. Teacher F reported:

"So, I think when participating in CoPs, you will learn and absorb more methods, teaching activities are also more diverse, and that's good, so I think being tutored or not applying the outside is not the reason teachers don't want to join the community of practice." (Teacher F)

Moreover, the participants also mentioned that their leaders have no worries that what teachers acquire from the CoPs can threaten their positions in their work since they have sufficient experience and especially the organizational policies to protect their power. Teacher F said:

"So, I think the superiors probably won't worry about the problem of being threatened with the management position because they are experienced, and they have policies to protect themselves." (Teacher F)

B. Teachers' institutional policies

The interviews' results revealed that besides that teachers worry about legal aspects, such as data confidentiality and intellectual property, they are also afraid that their materials or strategies are not sufficiently functional, leading to unexpected criticism. Teacher D commented:

“As for the ones that are related to the center or the superior, I think I need to get permission, or that means I won’t be able to share much with the community or group.”
(Teacher D)

Moreover, the participants also thought these problems could be solved by asking for permission from the authors of those materials or their leaders in their schools. Teacher E answered:

“Well, that means that what belongs to me personally, I am very comfortable sharing, and what is specified as internal circulation, I probably can’t share it, or at least I have to ask for permission from superiors, if possible, then share.” (Teacher E)

4.2. Discussion

A. Cultural barriers

The findings from the questionnaire reported that EFL teachers disagree that some rules and policies control and limit their choices of professional development activities. The result of the interviews also agreed that legitimacy is not a barrier since teachers believe there are no written rules that limit their actions and choices of partners in knowledge-sharing activities. This finding is opposed to the results of Goldstein (2004) and Murphy (2015) since they suggested that EFL are afraid of committing rules and policies that do not allow them to participate in activities outside their schools.

In addition, the quantitative data showed that EFL teachers partly agree that teachers do not want to bother other teachers because of their problems, which may hinder them from participating in CoPs. The interviews revealed that teachers believe that there are only certain occasions they can ask others for help, and they must make good choices of interaction to not hurt others’ feelings. Besides, the findings of the questionnaire showed that EFL teachers’ beliefs in autonomy might create discouragement for them from participating in CoPs. The qualitative data added that if teachers want to ask for help, they will make effort to solve the problems themselves in advance of finding solutions from others. These findings are partially in line with the results from studies of Levine and Marcus (2007) and Murphy (2015). They suggested that teachers’ beliefs in autonomy and privacy prevent them from participating in CoPs. The findings from the questionnaire suggested that EFL teachers disagree that their fear of criticism hinders their participation in CoPs. The interviews explained that although teachers’ ego causes their fear of criticism, this does not discourage them from participating in CoPs since they recognize the benefits of the community. This finding is opposite to the conclusions of Ardichvili et al. (2003), and Baran and Cagiltay (2010) when these researchers proposed that teachers’ fear of criticism is one of the main barriers for EFL teachers not to participate and construct CoPs.

Moreover, the questionnaire results proposed that EFL teachers disagree that their fear of arguments and conflicts makes them not want to participate and construct CoPs. The collected qualitative data added that EFL teachers were described as not fear

engaging in disputes or conflicts as long as they lead to effective and productive solutions and answers. This is opposed to the results proposed in previous studies by Danna (2002), Hew and Hara (2007), Ardichvili (2008), Baran and Cagiltay (2010), and Murphy (2015). They described teachers' civility rules as significant barriers that reduce teachers' willingness to participate in knowledge-sharing activities in CoPs.

Several pieces of literature (Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007; Baran & Cagiltay, 2010; Murphy, 2015) stated that teachers' fear of getting out of their comfort zones hinders them from participating in CoPs, communities with high collegiality. Nevertheless, the collected quantitative data revealed that EFL teachers disagree that their comfort zones discourage them from participating in CoPs. Also, the findings from the interviews confirmed the opposite perception that teachers are willing to change their working styles if necessary to acquire new knowledge and teaching methods.

B. Psychological barriers

Meanwhile, in the field of psychological barriers, the quantitative data revealed that EFL teachers disagree that CoPs are unreliable sources of knowledge. However, the findings from the interviews showed that although EFL teachers consider CoPs a reliable and practical source of knowledge, they still hesitate to participate in CoPs since they are afraid of not receiving appropriate materials and expertise for their teaching contexts. This is partially consistent with the literature (Baran & Cagiltay, 2010; Murphy, 2015) since they described that EFL teachers might not want to participate in CoPs due to their worries about the practicality of materials and knowledge shared in CoPs.

What is more, the questionnaire results showed that EFL teachers agree that they prefer face-to-face communication and interaction as they can quickly build trust with others to share their ideas freely and comfortably. However, the qualitative data proposed that lack of confidence in other members is not a barrier preventing EFL teachers' participation in CoPs. Still, their interests and their partners' personalities are more significant factors. These findings are different from the results proposed in the results of the studies from Tomes (2003), Gannon-Leary and Fontainha (2007), and Toland and Thomas (2018) when they described that ELF teachers are demotivated to participate in knowledge-exchanging activities in CoPs without trust in other members, which makes them hesitate to join in CoPs.

Additionally, the findings from the questionnaire showed that EFL teachers hold a neutral belief that teachers' lack of time is a barrier hindering them from participating and constructing CoPs. The results from the interviews also confirmed that lack of time is the barrier for only teachers in public schools since they have a massive number of missions besides teaching, while teachers in centers can manage their time. This finding is partially in line with the results of Firestone and Martinez (2007), Hew and Hara (2007), Baran and Cagiltay (2010), Cosner (2011), and Murphy (2015).

Furthermore, the quantitative data proposed that EFL teachers disagree with the statement that teachers are discouraged from participating in knowledge-sharing activities in CoPs due to their fear of criticism from teachers with higher levels of knowledge and expertise. The interviews also revealed that EFL teachers' differences in

the level of knowledge and experiences are suggested to be not a barrier discouraging teachers' participation in CoPs since they have a precise understanding of CoPs' positive effects on teachers' professional development. This is opposed to the findings from Hew and Hara (2007), Gannon-Leary and Fontainha (2007), and Baran and Cagiltay (2010) when they described that teachers' level differences discourage their participation in CoPs.

Finally, related to vCoPs, the results of the questionnaire showed that EFL teachers partly that their fears of misunderstanding and missing important information hinder them from participating in vCoPs. However, the findings proposed that teachers' fear of misunderstanding text messages and missing essential messages and posts is not a significant barrier since they can find possible solutions for the mentioned problems. These problems are partially in line with what was described in the studies of Hew and Hara (2007), Gannon-Leary and Fontainha (2007), and Baran and Cagiltay (2010).

C. Organization-related barriers

Regarding organization-related barriers, the results of the questionnaire suggested that EFL teachers partly agree that they are required to follow plans and lessons designed by higher positions in their bureaucracy. Besides, they disagree that their leaders do not want them to attend CoPs since updates and suggestions by CoPs may threaten their advantaged positions. However, the qualitative results revealed that the effects of schools' bureaucracy, especially leaders' power, are suggested to be not a barrier preventing EFL teachers from participating in CoPs since the school leaders provide their teachers with sufficient freedom to promote their self-professional development and applying what they learn from CoPs. These findings are opposed to the conclusions from Boles and Troen, (1996), Chrispeels and Martin (2002), and Murphy (2015) when these authors claimed that teachers are discouraged by the lack of their leaders' permission, and they are unable to apply what they received from CoPs.

Moreover, the collected quantitative data showed that EFL teachers partly agree that teachers are afraid of sharing information with CoPs since they are worried about the legal aspects, especially data confidentiality and intellectual property. However, the interviews suggested that legal elements, including schools' policies, data confidentiality, and intellectual property, are not considered barriers hindering EFL teachers from participating and constructing CoPs since they can find possible solutions for these problems. These findings are different from the results mentioned in the studies of Gannon-Leary and Fontainha (2007), and Ardichvili (2008) when these researchers described legal factors as considerable barriers preventing EFL teachers from participating in CoPs.

5. Conclusion, Implications, Recommendations

The current study was primarily conducted to identify the barriers that prevent EFL teachers from participating and constructing communities of practice. The findings were classified into teacher-related and organization-related barriers. Furthermore, teacher-

related barriers concluded cultural and psychological factors. At the same time, the former investigated EFL teachers' cultures in their living and working environment, the latter examined how teachers mentally react to factors that may affect their participation and construction in CoPs. Finally, organization-related barriers studied whether leaders' power and schools' policies hinder EFL teachers from participating and constructing CoPs. Ultimately, the results of this study confirmed that the barriers described in the theoretical framework are not numerous reasons discouraging EFL teachers in Vietnam from participating and constructing CoPs. It is anticipated that due to the differences in cultures between Vietnam and the countries of previous countries, including North America, Europe, Scandinavia, and Southeast Asia.

From the findings above, there are some practical implications that EFL teachers and school leaders should consider to enhance participating and constructing CoPs. First, it is of significance to introduce or propagate to EFL teachers the valuable merits they can receive while participating and constructing. Besides, it is necessary for CoPs' managers to research the members' concerns and problems to organize appropriate and well-timed activities and attracting members' attention and interest. Finally, it is significant for school leaders in particular and management positions in the educational system, in general, to consider re-organize the missions and duties of a public-school teacher so that they can have time for upgrading their professional knowledge and skills.

Although a great deal of effort was made to achieve the research aim of the study, there are unavoidable limitations due to internal and external factors as follows. Time limitation is a constraint that leads to several side effects. First, the study was conducted on a small number of samples whose majority are from a province in the Mekong Delta, so the generalization of the results is decreased. Second, also due to time limitations, few interviews were conducted with seven EFL teachers who are working in the same city in the Mekong Delta. Therefore, the findings and analysis of this study should be read and interpreted based on the context of the study. Finally, there is a considerable imbalance between the number of male and female participants responding to the questionnaire, which may reduce the validity of the independent-sample T-tests.

As mentioned, this study raised anticipation of cultural differences between Vietnam and the countries where CoPs are popularly applied on EFL teachers' willingness to participate and construct CoPs. Therefore, further studies in this field should focus on cultural differences and how they affect EFL teachers' participation in CoPs.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest for this study.

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